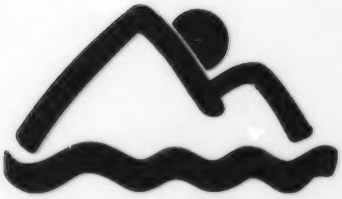
BC Environment

# Beverage Container Recovery System

## Consumer Attitudes



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# A Qualitative Evaluation of Consumer Attitudes Towards Beverage Container Recovery Systems

Municipal Waste Branch
Environmental Protection Division
B.C. Environment
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PREPARED BY: CANADIAN FACTS

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# I

# FOREWORD

## A. BACKGROUND

Over 60% of the 1.35 billion beverage containers used per year currently go to landfills or litter. The Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, assisted by the consulting firm of Peat Marwick Stevenson & Kellogg, is evaluating the effectiveness of alternative methods designed to ensure the removal of these containers from the waste stream. Recognizing that public involvement is a key factor in the success of any container recovery system, the ministry is interested in obtaining consumer input regarding this issue. To this end, Canadian Facts was commissioned to conduct a qualitative research study.

## B. OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this qualitative research project are:

- To determine consumer attitudes towards alternative beverage container recovery systems; and,
- To identify positive and negative reactions towards specific aspects of each proposed system.

A secondary objective of this research study is:

- To explore consumer attitudes, behaviour and motivations regarding current recycling and disposal practices for beverage containers.

## C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to the exploratory nature of these objectives and the need to obtain in-depth information about specific topics, a qualitative focus group approach was taken. A focus group is an informal discussion session in which a limited number of participants (usually between eight and ten) share their opinions, ideas, attitudes, perceptions and experiences on a carefully selected variety of topics. Group dynamics and the moderator's skill at guiding and probing combine to produce meaningful, actionable and often hidden results.

## D. GROUP COMPOSITION

Seven focus groups were conducted for this study during the first two weeks of March 1992. A total of 63 men and women attended.

The locations and composition of the groups were carefully chosen so that the research results would provide feedback from a cross-section of consumers, including those with special interests, who live in different parts of the province. Furthermore, in order to gain insight into the views of people with diverse recycling experiences, groups were held in areas which have present, past and no experience with blue box systems.

- Three groups in Vancouver (currently has a blue box program);
- Two groups in Kelowna (replaced the blue box program with a depot system); and,
- Two groups in Prince George (never had a blue box program).

All of the discussion sessions were comprised of a mixture of male and female respondents over the age of 25 years who have not attended a focus group during the past twelve months. Prospective participants who have worked in marketing, marketing research, advertising, public relations, media or in an occupation related to recycling—or who have family members who work in these areas—were disqualified.

Additional recruiting specifications were as follows:

Group I—Vancouver (March 4—6:00 p.m.)

- Active recyclers
- Some senior citizens
- Some disabled individuals

Group II—Vancouver (March 4—8:00 p.m.)

- Restricted recyclers
- Some senior citizens
- Some disabled individuals
- Represent a mix of municipalities in the Lower Mainland

Group III—Vancouver (March 5—6:00 p.m.)

- Less active recyclers
- Some senior citizens
- Some disabled individuals
- Represent a mix of municipalities in the Lower Mainland

Group IV—Kelowna (March 10—6:00 p.m.)

- Restricted and less active recyclers

Group V—Kelowna (March 10—8:00 p.m.)

- Active recyclers
- One-half to compost garden waste
- All to recycle beverage containers, newspapers and at least one other item

Group VI—Prince George (March 12—6:00 p.m.)

- Restricted and less active recyclers

Group VII—Prince George (March 12—8:00 p.m.)

- Active recyclers
- One-half to compost garden waste
- All to recycle beverage containers, newspapers and at least one other item

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used to delineate different consumer groups:

- **Active Recyclers**
  Individuals who recycle all, nearly all or most of the time at least six of these ten items: newspaper, corrugated cardboard, mixed paper, glass containers, plastic milk jugs, other plastic containers, soft drink/beer bottles/tins, tin cans and other metal containers, hazardous household wastes, used motor oil.

- **Restricted Recyclers**
  Individuals who state that their main reason for not recycling is because of physical limitations such as no blue box program, lack of space to store recyclables, no depot in the area or no car to drive.

- **Less Active Recyclers**
  Individuals who state that their main reason for not recycling is because of psychological limitations such as lack of interest, inconvenience or laziness.

## E. DESCRIPTION OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Each focus group began with a brief warm-up period designed to make the respondents comfortable with the informal research format. During this opening segment, participants were asked to explain what they do to reduce household waste. The topic of recycling was discussed in general terms and respondents were given an opportunity to describe the extent of their overall recycling efforts.

Group discussion then focussed on specific issues regarding beverage containers. Consumers identified the different kinds of beverage containers that are currently in the marketplace and described household recycling and disposal habits for each type of item. An effort was made to identify the reasons that motivate people to recycle containers instead of discarding them. In addition, attitudes towards the current return-to-retail system were explored in depth. The moderator also probed the issue of deposits and the impact this program has on beverage container recovery.

Consumer impressions of refillable containers were discussed in the next segment of the focus groups. Positive and negative opinions regarding this type of packaging were collected and reactions to using more refillables were elicited. After the idea of standardized refillable containers was introduced and explored, respondents were asked how they would feel if more beverages were packaged this way.

At this point in the discussion sessions, consumers were exposed to concept statements which provided descriptions of three alternative beverage container recovery systems currently under consideration by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks: Envirocentres, Reverse Vending Machines and Beverage Container Depots. The concepts were presented one at a time, with the order rotated from group to group to prevent bias. After each concept was read by the moderator, questions were posed to determine overall appeal, as well as to identify positive and negative reactions to specific features listed in the description. Group members were encouraged to share their impressions of every aspect of each concept, including what it might look like, where it should be located, how it could be staffed, and who would be responsible for it. Before this section of the groups was

terminated, respondents were asked to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of each of the three concepts and to identify the program which they felt has the greatest utility and overall appeal.

At the end of the focus groups, the discussion moved to more general topics, such as the need for pick-up services and the participation of charitable or non-profit organizations in container recovery programs. Attitudes towards banning non-recyclables, the enforcement of penalties on manufacturers who do not offer recyclable or refillable containers and the concept of split deposits were also explored.

## F. RESULTS

The results of this qualitative research study are reported in the form of:

1. Executive Summary
2. General Summary

The discussion guide, concept statements, recruiting specifications and recruiting questionnaire used in this study are appended to this report.

## G. A NOTE OF CAUTION

The reader is urged to bear in mind the clearly qualitative nature of this research study. These findings are drawn from a relatively small number of individuals who may or may not be typical in their views. While there is no obvious reason to suspect that these persons are not representative of their particular populations, the fact remains that these findings are not quantitative conclusions, but rather the qualitative insights of the moderator based on the response of a limited sample. They are not statistically valid unless quantified by more rigorous techniques of population sampling.

March 1992

# II

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of this qualitative research study indicate that the public is satisfied with the existing return-to-retail system of beverage container recovery. Consumers describe this method of return as simple and universally convenient. Although they criticize the return-to-retail program because of its restrictions (i.e., not all beverage containers are included; grocery outlets accept a limited number of pop containers), respondents are reluctant to replace the familiar return-to-retail method with a different form of container return.

Research findings suggest that consumers might react negatively to any container recovery system which does not include return-to-retail, at least in its initial stages. Returning pop and beer containers to grocery and liquor stores has become an automatic activity for a majority of those interviewed and there is every indication that it would be a difficult habit to break. However, if this option is maintained as other alternatives are introduced, there would be an opportunity to gradually "wean" the public away from return-to-retail, thus minimizing potential adverse reactions to a less familiar, and possibly even less convenient methods of container return.

In order to divert the return of containers from retail outlets to an alternative method of recovery, a refund hierarchy might be imposed. For example, only a partial refund would be awarded for containers which are returned to a grocery or liquor store, while the full amount of the deposit would be given to consumers who return their containers via alternative recovery options.

When it comes to alternative programs, respondents favour methods which are convenient and comprehensive. The importance of these two attributes is reflected in consumer reaction to the three ideas presented in this study. The Envirocentre concept, for instance, generated the greatest overall appeal because it is viewed as an easy means of disposing of a wide variety of recyclable materials. On the other hand, the Beverage Container Depot, which is perceived to be less convenient (if more comprehensive) than the

current return-to-retail method, received a mixed reception. The idea of the Reverse Vending Machine elicited the greatest number of unfavourable comments. Potential users reject this concept because they believe it will have a limited acceptance policy. Unfortunately, they also associate this idea with strong negative images of mechanical breakdowns and long line-ups.

Clearly, the more convenient a recovery system, the better it will be received and the more likely consumers will be to take advantage of it. Respondents insist they will not travel long distances (e.g., 20 minutes) in order to return beverage containers. Even the promise of a full refund is not enough to entice the public to go out of their way for this purpose. As a result, location and accessibility are key factors in the acceptance and utility of any recovery method.

The comprehensiveness of a recovery system also has a significant impact on public attitudes and behaviour. Consumers favour methods which are designed to accept a broad spectrum of beverage containers in unlimited quantities. Since respondents see no difference between recyclable and refillable containers, they insist that both types be incorporated into any container recovery system. To exclude refillables would simply complicate the system, create confusion and decrease the convenience of the recovery program.

Consumers are also more positively disposed towards recovery systems which provide the potential to increase, rather than decrease, job opportunities. Negative attitudes towards the Reverse Vending Machine, for example, were influenced by an impression that this concept would eliminate employment. The Envirocentre and Beverage Container Depot concepts, however, were perceived as a means of broadening the local job market and, therefore, received a better overall response.

Another element which has a positive impact on consumer attitudes is the notion that a container recovery system would provide work for the marginally employable. Respondents reacted quite favourably to the suggestion that an alternative recovery program might be staffed by physically or mentally challenged individuals. In fact, the appeal of a recovery system tends to increase when it is linked in some way to disabled or disadvantaged groups.

According to this qualitative study, the public is strongly opposed to government management of any beverage container recovery system. Consumers firmly believe that both the Provincial and Federal governments lack the business sense to run a program of this type. As an alternative to government control, respondents suggest that container recovery systems be run as private businesses.

And, finally, while consumers are reluctant to give up the return-to-retail system, they admit that the public will accept an alternative recovery program and container recovery restrictions that are legislated by the government. Citing the GST as an example of an unpopular ruling that was grudgingly accepted by the general public, group members recognize that, in the end, they have "no choice" but to abide by legislation regarding environmentally-friendly packaging and beverage container recovery systems.

*For Detailed Results See General Summary*

# III

# GENERAL SUMMARY

## A. GENERAL INFORMATION

People who recycle on a regular basis do so because they believe they are "contributing in making the environment better" by reducing the amount of waste. For Active Recyclers, the effort to reduce garbage has become "a habit." Respondents who describe themselves as Active Recyclers use blue boxes, make trips to local recycling depots, donate goods to charity and find alternative uses and methods of disposal for a wide variety of items. Although they admit that recycling activities can be tedious and time-consuming, these individuals continue to recycle because they are convinced that their efforts are worthwhile.

Restricted Recyclers believe in the need to reduce household waste, but find it difficult to commit themselves to a regular recycling program. While these consumers may have good intentions, they are daunted by physical limitations such as a lack of storage space or recycling facilities. Participants living in areas without depots or blue box programs fall into this category. In addition, people who do not drive or who do not own a car find it hard to transport household waste for recycling.

Less Active Recyclers are simply not interested in participating in programs designed to minimize garbage disposal. These respondents lack the motivation to recycle. They voice few environmental concerns, are skeptical that recycling has any significant impact and are lazy or easily put-out when it comes to waste reduction.

Despite the differences in their commitment towards recycling and the variations of their recycling activity, virtually all of the respondents who were interviewed for this qualitative research study participate in some form of beverage container recovery. Even Less Active Recyclers return bottles and cans to retailers on a regular basis. The reason for this behaviour is two-fold. First of all, consumers are motivated by the promise of a refund. The deposit paid at purchase is a strong incentive for container return (as will be

further detailed in Section C: The Impact of Deposits). And secondly, the current return-to-retail system for beverage container recovery is considered to be the most universally convenient form of recycling.

Everyone included in this study knows that the return-to-retail program accepts bottles and cans which contained beer or pop. Beyond this, however, the public shows little understanding of the basic differences among beverage containers. *For example, the average consumer sees little distinction between refillable and recyclable bottles.*

To most people, recycling is a generic term which encompasses all forms of environmentally-responsible disposal. Only when pressed do respondents define recycling in specific terms as a process which includes reducing a package to its component parts and then using this material to make a new container. Even though this definition clearly excludes the possibility of reusing the same container twice, a majority of those interviewed believe that refilling bottles is a "form of recycling."

Furthermore, to many, refilling a container is not something done at a bottling plant, but rather by an individual. As one person put it, it is "personal recycling." For instance, rather than throw out an empty juice bottle, a homemaker might rinse it out and then use it to store another beverage. Or a shopper might take an empty plastic bottle back to an Overwaitea supermarket and refill it with pop from a special dispenser.

Refilling containers is immediately identified as an individual act which is performed on a small scale by consumers. Nevertheless, when this subject is explored further, many people realize that most beer bottles, and perhaps some glass pop bottles, can be considered a form of refillable packaging.

*According to group members, "the only way to make people change over" to recyclable containers, including those which are refillable, is to ban the manufacture of non-recyclable packaging.* While many consumers might be educated to purchase only those products which are contained in environmentally-correct packaging, as long as some products are packaged in non-recyclable containers, there will be people who will buy them. And, say these respondents, as long as there are people who buy them, there will be non-recyclable containers to dispose of. In the minds of these group participants, the only

solution to this dilemma is to completely remove the offending containers from the marketplace. This means prohibiting manufacturers from selling products in non-recyclable packages. "It's time for something drastic," stated one Group V participant. "The only way companies will clean up their acts is if they're forced."

*Penalizing beverage manufacturers for using non-recyclable containers is not considered to be an adequate means of solving environmental problems.* Respondents are convinced that this technique will not eliminate, or even decrease, the distribution of non-recyclable packages. Instead, group members believe the manufacturers will merely compensate for the penalties by increasing the purchase price of their products. "They'll just jack the prices up," said one consumer, and "we'd end up paying for it."

## B. CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR REGARDING THE EXISTING RETURN-TO-RETAIL SYSTEM

*The public is satisfied with the existing return-to-retail recovery system because it is simple and convenient.* Only minimal sorting is involved and since consumers go to liquor stores or grocery outlets on a regular basis, they are not being forced to travel out of their way or make an extra trip in order to return containers. Virtually all consumers consider the return-to-retail system to be an easy way of keeping beverage containers out of the waste stream. As one individual observed, people take advantage of this recycling program "because the facility is there."

The appeal of the return-to-retail system is extremely wide-spread. Less Active and Restricted Recyclers, as well as Active Recyclers, participate in this program equally. Even the physically-challenged, the elderly and those without cars consider this method to be a feasible way of disposing of selected beverage containers. Since many of these individuals do not drink large quantities of pop or beer, they do not have large numbers of containers to return. As a result, it is easy for them to take along a grocery bag filled with refundable bottles and cans when they set out for a regular shopping trip to the store.

While consumers are basically satisfied with the return-to-retail system they describe this program as less than perfect. Respondents are particularly critical of the system because it excludes some beverage containers. Group members would like retailers to accept all beverage containers and not just bottles and cans for beer and pop. They complain, for example, that liquor stores do not allow returns of wine or spirit bottles, while grocery outlets refuse to take plastic milk jugs or mineral water containers. In fact, participants say, that by excluding these packages, the retailers are encouraging consumers to throw their beverage containers in the garbage.

Another disadvantage of the return-to-retail system is that grocery outlets restrict the number of pop containers they will accept. Although this policy has little impact on the return behaviour of individuals who drink limited amounts of pop and have only a small number of containers to return, heavy pop consumers are often forced to seek alternative methods of return for the large numbers of containers they accumulate. For some, this

entails travelling to a bottle depot or recycling facility. Others give their containers to a non-profit group, such as the boy scouts, or donate them to charity or homeless individuals.

Despite what are perceived as flaws in the program, consumers are reluctant to give up the return-to-retail system. Even when respondents were exposed to a variety of concepts designed to facilitate beverage container return, there was resistance to the idea of replacing return-to-retail with an alternative recovery program. Rather than being perceived as substitutes for the return-to-retail program, each of the concepts presented in this research study was considered to be suitable as a supplementary system. *It appears that the return-to-retail system is so well-engrained that the public would have difficulty replacing it with any less convenient form of container recovery, even if the new system was more comprehensive.*

## C. THE IMPACT OF DEPOSITS

*Deposits are considered to be an effective and acceptable method of encouraging consumers to return rather than dispose of their beverage containers*. While this financial incentive not the primary motivating factor for Active Recyclers who say they would "feel guilty" if they didn't dispose of containers properly, Less Active and Restricted Recyclers often admit that the reason they return beverage containers is "because of the money." Participants also state that "they might not do it so faithfully," if there was no financial incentive associated with returning containers. "If there's no money in it," explained a member of Group IV, "you don't do it."

Consumers believe that more beverage containers would be kept out of the waste stream if all bottles, cans and cartons could be returned for a refund. As a result of this impression, virtually all group members advocate the extension of the deposit system to a wider range of beverage containers.

Furthermore, respondents feel deposits should be high. "Make me pay heavy through the nose in the first place," said one participant and there will be a greater likelihood that more people will dispose of their beverage containers in the proper fashion. In fact, most group members feel the existing levels of deposits should be raised. In their minds, this would encourage the public to return even more containers. Within these focus groups, people suggested pop cans should have a deposit of 10¢, with beer bottle deposits increased to 25¢. There was general agreement, however, that the current 30¢ deposit on two-litre plastic bottles is already at an appropriate level.

In addition to raising the levels of deposits, the people who were interviewed for this research study would also like to see the deposit system made more consistent. The public is frustrated, and sometimes confused, by the varying levels of deposits which are imposed on containers that have a similar appearance. According to these consumers, containers of similar size and material should have the same deposit, no matter what beverage they contain. In other words, an individual would be charged the same deposit for an equal-sized can of beer or pop were they made from the same material (e.g., aluminum).

Some consumers are willing to sacrifice the refund. People who drink a lot of pop and have basements, garages or other facilities in their homes in which to store empty containers, often wait until they have accumulated a significant number of cans and bottles before they return them. Since retailers limit the number of pop containers they accept at any one time, these consumers must pursue other ways of returning the large number of containers they have saved. Frequently, when this situation arises, disposal of the containers becomes more important than recouping the deposit. Some respondents will make a special trip to a private depot which accepts an unlimited number of containers, but reimburses only part of the deposit. Others actually forego the total amount of the refund by donating their containers to needy individuals or to a bottle drive for a non-profit organization.

During these focus groups, consumers were asked several questions regarding the concept of variable deposits. As was mentioned previously in this section, participants firmly believe the deposit system should be made more consistent. Group members are opposed to deposit programs which are based on a complicated hierarchy of containers. For example, respondents rejected the idea that a differential deposit might be established between refillable and recyclable containers. Since refillables and recyclables are often perceived to be similar, consumers feel such a deposit differential would only create confusion, and perhaps even animosity. As one participant observed, "You ... shouldn't be penalized because your efforts are the same."

In addition, respondents are concerned about how the incremental deposit difference would be spent. Among members of the public, there is a strong impression that the money would be wasted on government programs or administrative costs, rather used to fund genuine environmental improvements. Respondents are reluctant to sanction any program which appears to put more money in government pockets.

The concept of a "split" deposit system also generated a negative response. Again, participants are convinced that the incremental difference would go "to paperwork" and not for the establishment of practical environmental programs.

## D. CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS STANDARDIZED REFILLABLE CONTAINERS

The idea of standardized refillable containers was well-received by a majority of respondents. Most participants recognize the environmental benefits of such a program. Furthermore, consumers assume that with standardized refillables, the "handling costs would come right down" in regard to container recovery programs.

Based on group reactions, it seems unlikely that consumers would change their buying habits if beverage products were made available in standardized containers because, as a woman from Group I explained, "You buy the contents, not the actual bottle." It should be noted, however, that a few people who participated in this qualitative study admit that they "would be sad to lose the variety" if only standardized containers were available. "Life's dull enough," observed one man. But, in general, most individuals concede that the positive environmental elements of this concept outweigh other, less important concerns.

The issue of cleanliness, however, is a concern which needs to be addressed when discussing the concept of refillable containers. Within each focus group, one or two participants wondered whether refillable containers are as sanitary as other types of packaging. These respondents are easily reassured, though, when told that refillables are sterilized at the bottling plant.

## E. REACTIONS TO ALTERNATIVE BEVERAGE CONTAINER RECOVERY SYSTEM CONCEPTS

### 1. Common Impressions

Three separate beverage container recovery system concepts were presented in this qualitative research study. Although each of these concepts differed from the others in many respects, they generated a significant number of common impressions among respondents.

One of the most important common reactions relates to the management of these recovery systems. *Consumers are vigorously opposed to any suggestion that the Federal or Provincial government might run a beverage container recovery program.* The public is totally convinced that the "government doesn't know how to run a business." According to respondents, the government is inefficient and sometimes, irresponsible, when it comes to programs of this type. "The government functions like a large company," noted one participant, and "I don't trust large companies."

People also assume that recovery programs would be more costly if the government took control of them. These costs, complain group members, would be passed along to the public in the form of "increased taxes."

Opposition to the concept of government management is widespread. Within these focus groups, negative reaction was so strong that there is every indication that consumers would be wary of any container recovery system that was operated by government authorities.

As an alternative to government control, respondents in all of the focus groups proposed that beverage container recovery systems should be run as independent businesses. Group members feel these concepts are a natural way to increase private enterprise within the province. In fact, these container recovery programs are perceived to be a perfect opportunity for local entrepreneurs to develop viable businesses.

An approach which generates positive response is the notion that beverage container recovery programs could provide employment for the physically or emotionally challenged. Respondents like the idea that marginally-employable individuals could find work within the context of these systems. In fact, the appeal of container recovery programs tends to increase slightly when they are linked to the disabled or disadvantaged.

*It is also important to note that these recovery systems are generally perceived as supplementary to the existing return-to-retail program.* Respondents have difficulty visualizing an end to return-to-retail. The current system is considered to be so convenient and familiar, that consumers are reluctant to give it up entirely. Instead, the concepts presented in this qualitative study are considered to be acceptable as long as they complement, but do not replace, the current return-to-retail system.

Nevertheless, it is another commonly held view that the public will accept any recovery program or restrictions which are legislated by the government. Respondents cite the GST as an example of an unpopular government ruling that was reluctantly accepted by the general public. Because of this recent experience, group members recognize that, in the end, there is "no choice" but to accept legislation regarding environmentally-friendly packaging and beverage container recovery systems.

## 2. The Reverse Vending Machine Concept

*The Reverse Vending Machine concept generated more negative than positive reactions.* Although respondents realize that this machine would provide consumers with a convenient, unrestricted means of return, participants associate many unfavourable images with the concept.

Mechanical failure and long line-ups are perceived to be the key disadvantages of this idea. Because of frustrating experiences with other kinds of machines such as parking meters, stamp machines and automated bank tellers, consumers are convinced that the Reverse Vending Machine will suffer from frequent break-downs. Respondents are generally skeptical when it comes to the practical utility of mechanical devices. "I don't trust machines," said one person. While a member of Group VI observed, "If it's man-made, it's fallible."

Doubts about the reliability of Reverse Vending Machines permeated each focus group. "There's always going to be a period where something goes wrong ... you could be a victim," stated a Vancouver participant. "If your bottle is a bit out of shape, it (the machine) rejects it," explained another, "and I'm stuck with it again." In fact, the issue of rejection surfaced repeatedly, since respondents are convinced that the machine will not be able to process crushed, broken or misshapen containers.

In addition, there is concern that this return system will generate long waits as people feed large quantities of containers into the machine. "The guy with twenty cases of beer bottles is gonna be there all day," quipped one man.

The Reverse Vending Machine concept becomes even less attractive when consumers learn there will be a unit for each different type of beverage container. Consumers balk at the idea of having to sort their bottles and cans for the purpose of return, especially since the current return-to-retail system does not require such sorting. "We're not being paid to do that for them," complained one person.

There is also a concern that the Reverse Vending Machine will reduce rather than increase employment opportunities. It is a widely held impression that mechanical systems eliminate jobs. Respondents are reluctant to commit themselves to any container recovery program which might decrease employment opportunities in their community.

Despite negative attitudes towards this concept, a number of group members recognize that Reverse Vending Machines might actually be more convenient. As one participant explained, the machines could "save time" because "you don't have to wait for a service person" to be available. However, this positive perception is contradicted by the impression that "people are more reliable" than machines.

Most group members imagine that Reverse Vending Machines would be located directly outside of the retail outlets where beverages are purchased. Since consumers make regular trips to these stores in order to buy beverages, this location is perceived to be the most logical and convenient spot for container return.

According to many consumers, Reverse Vending Machines also belong in apartment complexes or even schools and university campuses. "Anywhere where there's a high concentration of people," explained one person, who continued, "Anywhere where they sell cans, they should have machines."

Among group members, there was a general impression that Reverse Vending Machines would appeal primarily to children. In fact, there is concern that teenagers might actually abuse the machines. "A kid will come along and give it a good boot," noted a Group IV participant.

Aside from their exposure to the concept, few group members have had any personal experience with Reverse Vending Machines. However, a select number of people within these focus groups have seen this recovery system being used in California. Individuals such as these, who have had some contact with the actual machine, appear to be the most positively inclined towards the concept. Familiarity with the equipment improves overall attitudes towards this proposed recovery system by alleviating many of the practical concerns which are associated with it.

### 3. The Beverage Container Depot Concept

*Reactions to the Beverage Container Depot concept were mixed.* While respondents like the idea that the depot would accept unlimited quantities of containers and reimburse the full amount for all refundable containers, many consumers wonder how the proposed concept differs from existing systems. "Isn't that basically what we have now?" asked a woman in Prince George.

This concept appeals primarily to consumers who accumulate a significant number of bottles and cans before returning them. Respondents who regularly return fewer than two-to-three dozen containers at one time are content with the existing return-to-retail system because it is so convenient. These consumers see no reason to travel out of their way to a bottle depot. On the other hand, group members who save large quantities of containers realize the advantage of taking a "mixed load" of beer and pop containers to one location and receiving a full refund.

Location and accessibility have a direct impact on the appeal and utility of this concept. The more conveniently-located the depot, the more likely consumers will be to use it. Respondents insist that they will not make the effort to travel long distances in order to return beverage containers. Even the promise of a full refund is not enough of an incentive when it comes to driving several miles to get to a depot, since as several group members point out, the refund does not compensate for the cost of the gas it takes to get there.

In addition, consumers feel that the depots must be easily accessible. "I don't wanna drive twenty minutes" to get there said an individual from Group IV "It's gotta be where people go anyway," explained another participant. However, for consumers, convenience is measured by more than location alone. Respondents note that the facility must also have adequate parking and extended hours of operation (e.g., 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.).

According to participants, each municipality should be serviced by several beverage container depots. Respondents would prefer a system which includes a number of small, conveniently-located container return facilities, rather than one large depot which is situated in an out-of-the-way location. Instead of one large "warehouse," participants suggest three to four "small, temporary storage" facilities which are "centrally-located." Often, to consumers, the phrase "centrally-located" means "near a shopping centre."

Group members are disappointed that the container depot (as described in the concept statement) would not take a wider range of containers. Many respondents save or reuse plastic milk and water jugs, milk cartons and juice boxes because they feel guilty about throwing them in the garbage. Research indicates that consumers feel a "universal" Beverage Container Depot should not be restricted to just recyclable and refillable beverage containers, but should accept these packages as well. Furthermore, consumers believe the depot should not be limited only to beverage containers, but should take a wider range of recyclable and refillable items, such as glass jars.

Attitudes towards the proposed depot system become less positive when respondents are told that these depots might only accept recyclable containers. Since most consumers have difficulty identifying the difference between recyclable and refillable

containers, this limitation creates confusion. In addition, with this restriction in place, respondents believe there is no advantage to using a depot over the existing return-to-retail system. As one respondent explained, it is like "regressing further back."

When the suggestion is made that the return policy of grocery outlets might become more restricted or that the return-to-retail program might be eliminated completely, attitudes towards the depot system improve slightly. Still, there is concern that the depot system might place a burden on less mobile consumers who are unable to travel to these facilities because of a handicap or lack of transportation.

## 4. The Envirocentre Concept

*This concept generated the greatest overall appeal among the majority of consumers*. With the exception of Group I (Active Recyclers in Vancouver), respondents in every discussion session consider the Envirocentre to be the best of the three proposed container recovery systems. In Vancouver, negative attitudes towards this concept emanate from a perception that "it's not as convenient as the Blue Box program."

The Envirocentre's appeal stems from the fact that it takes more than just beverage containers. Consumers are attracted to this concept because it provides one convenient location for disposing of a wide variety of recyclable materials. During group discussions, it became clear that respondents consider beverage container recovery to be a secondary feature of this alternative. The best part about this idea, observed a man in Kelowna, is that "you've got a one-stop get-rid-of centre" for everything. It is, observed a Prince George participant, "The ultimate answer to the problem" of garbage disposal.

Restricting the Envirocentre to recyclable containers limits its appeal. If consumers are forced to return refillable containers elsewhere, then the Envirocentre becomes a less convenient place for beverage container recovery.

The Envirocentre is considered to be particularly attractive by residents of communities where few recycling facilities currently exist. Respondents in Price George and Kelowna are eager to have more local recycling opportunities. The Envirocentre concept fills a definite need in these communities by providing residents with a place where

they can responsibly dispose of a wide variety of items. As one person in Kelowna explained, the Envirocentre is a "catch-all for basically everything you want to recycle."

Consumers visualize the Envirocentre as a large warehouse in an industrial area. Because the concept describes a facility which will accept a broad spectrum of recyclable materials, respondents imagine that the Envirocentre will be "a huge place." Logically, the only area which would be suitable for such a facility would be an industrial site. There is some concern, however that if this centre includes uncovered s[illegible]e, it might end up looking like "a junk yard."

Recognizing that a single large facility might not be convenient for most people, respondents suggest that the Envirocentre could maintain several smaller "satellite" locations within each community. These "satellites" would be situated in easily accessible locations throughout the municipality. However, because these facilities take more than just beverage containers, respondents realize that they might be too large to place in the immediate vicinity of shopping malls or grocery outlets. Nevertheless, consumers hope that the "satellite" stations will be centrally-located near their homes and offices.

A broad majority of group members indicate that they would take advantage of Envirocentres. Most consumers, and particularly those who are concerned about the environment and issues related to garbage disposal, say they would use Envirocentres. Frequency of usage varies, however, and is dependent on the convenience of the facility, as well as the rate at which each household accumulates recyclable materials.

Again, however, as with the depot concept, consumers worry that the individuals who conceived the Envirocentre idea are "discounting people who don't drive." Especially when compared to the Blue Box program, the Envirocentre concept is described as "hard for older people" and those with disabilities.

# IV

# APPENDIX

A. DISCUSSION GUIDE

B. CONCEPT STATEMENTS

C. RECRUITING SPECIFICATIONS

D. RECRUITING QUESTIONNAIRE

# ALTERNATIVE BEVERAGE CONTAINER RECOVERY SYSTEMS FINAL FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE—RX044

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Explain procedure.
2. Introduce moderator.
3. Identify respondents (first name; type of residence).

## II. GENERAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR REGARDING RECYCLING

1. Determine the extent of consumer recycling behaviour.
2. Isolate barriers to recycling.
3. Explore methods of increasing consumer recycling behaviour.

## III. SPECIFIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR REGARDING CURRENT BEVERAGE CONTAINER RECYCLING AND RECOVERY

1. Identify the various kinds of beverage container recycling activities currently being practiced by consumers.
2. Isolate the motivations for recycling beverage containers.
3. Explore the reasons why consumers recycle certain beverage containers and not others.
4. Probe if required to determine the impact of deposits and likelihood of returning containers with and without deposits.
5. Determine barriers to recycling more or different types of beverage containers.

## IV. ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFILLABLES

1. Determine the consumer definition of a "refillable" beverage container.
2. Probe positive/negative attitudes towards using more refillable containers.
3. Assess reactions to the concept of standardized refillables.

## V. REACTIONS TO ALTERNATIVE BEVERAGE CONTAINER RECOVERY PROGRAMS

1. Envirocentres.

2. Reverse Vending Machines.

3. Beverage Container Depots.

For each concept, read a brief descriptive statement and then for each concept statement:

- Determine overall consumer impressions of the proposal.
- Identify key positive and negative aspects of the proposal.
- Explore attitudes and opinions towards specific features of each proposal, including:

For Envirocentres and Depots:

- What should the centres look like?
- How many should there be?
- Where should they be located? (Near retail stores or elsewhere?)
- How should they be staffed?
- Who would pay/be responsible for these centres?
- Would consumers actually take advantage of these? Why/why not?
- What impact would these envirocentres have on the blue box program? On litter control? On reducing landfill waste?
- What is the impact on attitudes if employment opportunities are provided for disabled or marginally employable people at the envirocentres?

For Reverse Vending Machines:

- How likely are consumers to use these machines?
- Who would be responsible for these machines?
- Where should they be located? At stores, in apartment buildings, etc.?

## VII. REACTIONS TO SUPPLEMENTARY CONCEPTS REGARDING BEVERAGE CONTAINER RECOVERY PROGRAMS

1. Determine attitudes towards pick-up programs where a charity or other institution benefits financially from this service.

2. Identify attitudes towards enforcing penalties (e.g., financial levy) on manufacturers who do not offer recyclable or refillable containers. What should be done about non-recyclables?

3. Elicit reactions to a deposit minimum of 10¢ for every beverage container. Also, to a split deposit system i.e., 7¢ deposit, 5¢ refund where the difference is used to fund environmental programs.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

## CONCEPT STATEMENTS

### Envirocentre

An Envirocentre is a recycling depot which accepts a variety of recyclable materials including car batteries, tires, paint cans, aerosal cans, cardboard, newspapers, mixed paper, telephone books, metal, selected plastics and beverage containers.

For those items, such as beverage containers, on which a deposit has been paid at purchase, the refund will be paid to the consumer by the envirocentre.

Variation: these envirocentres will be the only place where you can return recyclable containers. Refillables must be returned to the retailer.

### Reverse Vending Machines

A Reverse Vending Machine is a machine which accepts all refundable beverage containers except refillables.

The consumer places containers into the machine one at a time. This machine scans the label or shape of the container to determine if a refund is due and presents the consumer with a printed voucher. This receipt covers the amount of the refund due on the total number of refundable containers inserted into the machine. The consumer can then redeem this voucher for cash at designated retail outlets.

A separate machine would be required for each type of container.

Variation: these machines would be in addition to other return systems.

### Beverage Container Depots

A universal beverage container depot would accept and refund the deposit on all refillable and recyclable beverage containers. At the present time, milk cartons and juice boxes would not be accepted.

Variation: this depot accepts only recyclable and non-refillables. Refillable containers must be returned to the retailer where purchased.

## RECRUITING SPECIFICATIONS
## BEVERAGE CONTAINER RECYCLING GROUPS—RX044

Group I:
Name: Active Recyclers
Location: Lower Mainland
Date/Time: March 4, 6:00 p.m.

- To recycle all, nearly all of the time or most of the time at least six of the following ten items:
  - Newspaper
  - Corrugated Cardboard
  - Mixed Paper
  - Glass Containers
  - Plastic Milk Jugs
  - Other Plastic Containers
  - Soft Drink/Beer Bottles/Tins
  - Tin Cans And Other Metal Containers
  - Hazardous Household Wastes
  - Used Motor Oil
- All to reside in the Lower Mainland and drawn from a mix of different municipalities.
- Males and females.
- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25 years.
- Should include two senior citizens.
- Could include one or two disabled people

Group II:
Name: Restricted Recyclers
Location: Lower Mainland
Date/Time: March 4, 8:00 p.m.

- All to usually recycle no more than three of the ten items.
- All to state that their main reason for not recycling is not because of a lack of interest or intent, but because of physical limitations such as no blue box program, lack of space to store recyclables, no depot in area, or no car to drive to depot.
- All to reside in the Lower Mainland and drawn from a mix of different municipalities.

- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25 years.
- Should include two senior citizens.
- Could include one or two disabled people

Group III:
Name: Less Active Recyclers
Location: Lower Mainland
Date/Time: March 5, 6:00 p.m.

- All to usually recycle no more than three of the ten items.
- All to state that their main reason for not recycling is because of psychological limitations such as a lack of interest, inconvenience, laziness, etc.
- All to reside in the Lower Mainland and drawn from a mix of different municipalities.
- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25 years.
- Should include two senior citizens.
- Could include one or two disabled people

Group IV:
Name: Less Active And Restricted Recyclers
Location: Kelowna
Date/Time: March 10, 6:00 p.m.

- All to usually recycle one or fewer of the ten items.
- Reasons for not recycling could include both physical and psychological limitations. One-half of the group should be comprised of those who don't recycle because of physical limitations and the other one-half psychological limitations
- All to reside in the Kelowna region.
- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25 years.

Group V:

Name: Active Recyclers
Location: Kelowna
Date/Time: March 10, 8:00 p.m.

- All to usually recycle at least soft drink/beer bottles/tins, newspapers and at least one other item.
- At least one-half to compost garden waste.
- All to consider themselves "active recyclers."
- All to reside in the Kelowna region.
- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25 years.

Group VI:

Name: Less Active And Restricted Recyclers
Location: Prince George
Date/Time: March 12, 6:00 p.m.

- All to usually recycle one or fewer of the ten items.
- Reasons for not recycling could include both physical and psychological limitations. One-half of the group should be comprised of those who don't recycle because of physical limitations and the other one-half psychological limitations
- All to reside in the Prince George region.
- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25 years.

Group VII:

Name: Active Recyclers
Location: Prince George
Date/Time: March 12, 8:00 p.m.

- All to usually recycle at least soft drink/beer bottles/tins, newspapers, and at least one other item.
- At least one-half to compost garden waste.
- All to consider themselves "active recyclers."
- All to reside in the Prince George region.
- Include a mix of respondents over the age of 25.

**FOR ALL GROUPS:**

- Participant and other family members not to have worked in marketing, marketing research, advertising, public relations, media (television, radio or newspapers) or in an occupation related to recycling.

- None to have attended a focus group in the past year.

# RECRUITING QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH HOUSE INC.
468-4900 Kingsway
Burnaby, B.C.
V5H 4J2
433-2696

JOB # 92V0304

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____

Recruiter _____

TEL. RES. _____ BUS. _____

Hello, my name is _____ from Research House, an independent market research firm.

1a. Have you ever attended a consumer group discussion, an interview or survey which was arranged in advance and for which you received a sum of money?

Yes ( ) - MAX 1/2 GROUP
No ( ) - SKIP TO 2a

b. IF YES, ASK
How long ago was it? _____ TERM. IF IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

c. How many groups have you attended? _____

What topics have you discussed? _____ _____

_____ _____

TERM. IF RECYCLING MENTIONED OR IF ATTENDED MORE THAN FIVE GROUPS.

3a. Are you ...SINGLE ( ) MARRIED/CO-HAB ( ) DIVORCED/SEP ( ) WIDOW ( ) ?

b. Are you the head of the household? YES ( ) NO ( )

4a. What is your current occupation? _____ / _____
type of job type of company

b. Have you yourself ever worked in or does any member of your family currently work for .....READ LIST.....[TERM IF YES]

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| MARKET RESEARCH FIRM | ( ) | ( ) |
| MARKETING | ( ) | ( ) |
| ADVERTISING AGENCY | ( ) | ( ) |
| ANY MEDIA (RADIO, TV, PRINT) | ( ) | ( ) |
| PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM | ( ) | ( ) |
| BEEN AN ACTRA MEMBER | ( ) | ( ) |
| OCCUPATION RELATED TO RECYCLING | ( ) | ( ) |

5. IF MARRIED ASK:
What is your spouse's current occupation?

_____ / _____
type of job type of company

6. What is your age? _____ (GOOD SPREAD)

| | |
|---|---|
| UNDER 25 | ( ) TERMINATE |
| 25-34 YR. | ( ) |
| 35-45 YR. | ( ) |
| 45-54 YR. | ( ) |
| 55-69 YR. | ( ) |
| OVER 69 | ( ) |

6a. How many years have you lived in CANADA ?

ALL MY LIFE ( ) OTHER _____ TERMINATE IS LESS THAN 5 YRS.

6b. How many years have you lived in B.C. _____ ? TERMINATE IF LESS THAN 2 YEARS?

7a. Do you know anyone who is attending this group?

YES ( ) TERMINATE
NO ( )

8. What was the last year of education completed?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Completed high school | [ ] | Some high school | [ ] |
| Completed college | [ ] | Some college | [ ] |
| Completed university | [ ] | some university | [ ] |

9. Which of the following best represents your total household income?

| | |
|---|---|
| Under $15,000 | [ ] |
| 15,000 to 24,999 | [ ] |
| 25,000 to 34,999 | [ ] |
| 35,000 to 44,999 | [ ] |
| 45,000 to 64,999 | [ ] |
| Over 65,000 | [ ] |

10. What is the total number living in your household? _____

11. Which of the following items, if any, do you recycle most of the time?

__ Newspapers

__ Corrugated cardboard

__ Mixed Paper

__ Glass Containers

__ Plastic Milk Jugs

__ Other Plastic Containers

__ Soft Drink/Beer Bottles/Tins

__ Tin Cans and Other Metal Containers

__ Hazardous Household Wastes

__ Used Motor Oil

__ Compost

IF SIX OR MORE - RECRUIT FOR GROUP 1.
IF THREE OR LESS - CONTINUE.

12. What is the main reason that you do not do more recycling?
DO NOT READ LIST.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| No blue box program | ( ) | |
| Lack of space to store recyclables | ( ) | GROUP 2 |
| No depot in area | ( ) | RESTRICTED |
| No car to drive to depot | ( ) | |
| Not interested in recycling | ( ) | |
| Inconvenient | ( ) | GROUP 3 |
| Lazy-too much work to recycle | ( ) | LESS ACTIVE |
| Need to recycle is over exaggerated | ( ) | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GROUP 1: | WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4/92 | 6:00 PM | ( ) | ACTIVE RECYCLERS |
| GROUP 2: | | 8:00 PM | ( ) | RESTRICTED RECYCLERS |
| GROUP 3: | THURSDAY, MARCH 5/92 | 6:00 PM | ( ) | LESS ACTIVE RECYCLERS |

CANADIAN FACTS
#600 - 1130 WEST PENDER ST.
VANCOUVER